

# The Year of the Angels

*Finding the human face of socially responsible business*

By Marjorie Kelly

*"What power on earth has ever succeeded in arresting the growth of an idea or a passion once it has taken shape?"*

Teilhard de Chardin,  
*The Future of Man*

**I**t's curious how we come upon our personal truths — how certain kinds of knowledge can begin as something external, a kind of fact we discover, and end up transforming our life. It's as though the knowledge literally enters us, becomes a part of our being. Or perhaps it's the other way around: that such knowledge comes forth from our being, and we only discover it when we see it mirrored in the world.

With *Business Ethics*, the idea for the magazine seemed to begin as a piece of knowledge that stepped out from the world and announced itself to me. Through my reading and information-gathering, I became aware of something new taking shape in business; a more humane and responsible way of doing business was emerging in our time — a style more inclined to elicit cooperation than dictate orders, a style revealed in a growing interest in team-building, human resources, employee ownership, stakeholder management, ethical investing, or union-management cooperation. From my armchair, amidst my magazine and newsletter clippings, I began to form a vision of a new breed of business leaders coming into power, executives who are socially aware, sensitive to the human dimension of their work, and responsible members of their communities.

I felt I must have dreamed them into existence, this new breed of business leaders, but in the past year this dream has come to life in the most extraordinary way. Early in 1988, I had decided to take a break in publishing, to begin searching for a way to launch on a larger scale. It was a difficult time for *Business Ethics*, but as fate would have it, it was precisely those difficulties that brought me where I needed to be: into the center of the most astonishing community of business people in our time. Only if they helped me could I make the magazine work — and help they did.

People came out of the woodwork for *Business Ethics*. I was taken under the wing of David Brunell, an investment banker specializing in socially responsible business who had experience in magazine launches. Through him, I met Tom Abeles, who introduced me to Bob Kramarczuk of the College of St. Thomas Enterprise Center, and together they convinced me to move to Minneapolis — a major breakthrough for the magazine. Also through

Brunell, I met Phillip Moffitt, former editor of *Esquire*, who offered invaluable advice and encouragement during one of my darkest hours. ("You've got a niche here," Moffitt told me. "Huge amounts of revenue could come in if you get the right break.")

Jim Autry, head of the magazine division at Meredith Corporation, gave me similarly enthusiastic feedback, and brought me to his office in Des Moines, to have his staff review my business plan. Autry has since become a personal friend — a role model of the kind of caring manager I'd like to be; you'll find a long conversation between the two of us beginning on page 20. Also of great help was Tom Wyman — former head of CBS and now a teacher of ethics at Yale — who met with me in New York, to share his advice on my new corporate sponsorship program.

Leading people in the field like William Norris of Control Data and Joan Shapiro of South Shore Bank agreed to join my advisory board — and through Norris I met Bert Lund, formerly with Webb Publishing, who has since become a regular advisor to the magazine. Eric Utne of the *Utne Reader* shared with me the lessons from his own launch, and put me in touch with futurist and author Hazel Henderson, who also joined my advisory board.

What I discovered, in a most personal and powerful way, is the human face of socially responsible business. In my travels across the country, I encountered growing communities of people, who singly and together were up to something good — powerful people, with resources and the skills to use them, scheming to make this a better world. They are part of a growing body of professionals who find they need not leave their humanity at the door of the workplace, who find there is in fact no better place to come to one's full humanity than inside business, no better way to serve other humans than through business.

If such people are not the majority in business today, they are a significant and ever-increasing minority. They are coming together in groups and networks across the nation, and while the focus varies from group to group and place to place, the intent is much the same: to bring a humane spirit to business, to reclaim business as servant to humankind, not as tyrant over it.

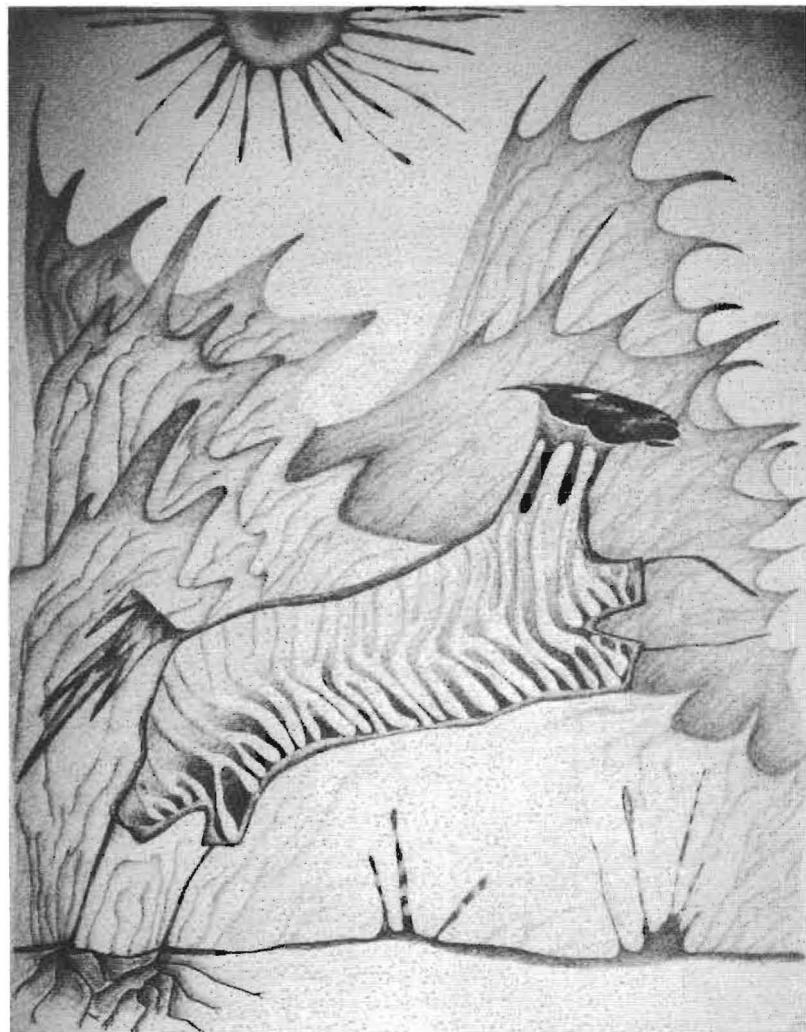
*A new breed of business leader is reclaiming business as servant to humankind, not as tyrant over it.*

**O**n the West Coast, groups like Doug Kruschke's Gathering of Leaders or Summit Teams focus on personal and spiritual growth for top executives. At a recent Gathering, for example, the topic was business and service, and how better to integrate the two in one's life; on page 8 you'll find profiles of some of the inspiring individuals who attended. If the focus on the West Coast is personal growth, the focus on the East Coast is financial, with groups such as the Social Venture Network bringing together investors, financial managers, and social entrepreneurs — working together to catalyze an authentic movement of business people committed to social change. In the Midwest, the focus is community service, as it is in Minneapolis/St. Paul, where the business community has long been known for its generous involvement with civic affairs. As one of the oldest and most successful exemplars of responsible business, the Twin Cities offer a particularly fascinating look at how such a community evolves over time, and may provide insights into what we can expect elsewhere. Bonnie Blodgett's cover story on the Twin Cities begins on page 14.

In communities and gatherings like these across the nation, I found companies and individuals who ran the gamut from low income to extremely high income, from for-profit to nonprofit, from small alternative companies to the Fortune 500. There are those who work in traditional industries and do service work on the side. A good example is David Koch of Graco, who runs a \$270 million company that produces fluid systems such as hydraulic pumps or spray guns, and who also founded the 5 Percent Club in Minneapolis, honoring businesses that give 5 percent of pre-tax profits to charity. There are others whose companies are more explicitly geared toward social service — such as David Friedman, whose Sandy River Group develops socially responsible nursing care centers for the elderly, or P. William Parish, whose National Energy Associates created the Mesquite Lake power plant, which burns manure instead of fossil fuel.

There are those who aren't business people themselves but work with business. Harrison Owen, a former priest, is now a consultant to multinational corporations, advising them on how to work with the "spirit" of their companies. And there are those who use business techniques for social goals. William Burrus of ACCION International, for example, uses a community banking system to bring financial resources into Third World development, at the grass roots level.

On the nonprofit side, there are people like Margaret Cheap of the National Cooperative Bank, who is in charge of a \$40 million risk capital fund that lends to or invests in cooperatives and employee-owned businesses. There are inventors such



*Sweater Horse: Why's.* Margaret Mear, pencil drawing, 1986.

as Stan Hallett, founder of Pathfinder Systems, who is building a prototype for a new personal rapid transit system, a two-horsepower electric vehicle to reduce auto use — or Steve Beck, whose company is now developing a phosphotron to induce images in the eyes of the blind with electronic goggles.

These are the sort of projects we once might have expected from social activists outside the mainstream, who could garner resources only by beating on the doors of power. But today, such projects are originating from within the halls of power, through people who use their own skills and organizational resources in the service of a greater good.

What is emerging is a model of capitalism at its best: capitalism in service to society. And what better engine to enlist in the cause? We might think of the modern business corporation as one of our highest forms of collective intelligence — embodying as it does the knowledge of thousands of professionals, working through systems that are constantly refined, backed by the powerful force of finance.

However compelling such a vision may be — this notion of business in service to society — it is not

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without pitfalls. The spirit that is awakening in business today is a young spirit, not yet seasoned, not yet grown beyond its adolescent enthusiasms and blunders. There is always the danger that some will do harm when they intend to help, or that others will use social responsibility purely as a cover for self-interest. For if there is something new growing in business today, there is still ample evidence of the old: the spirit of callousness, greed, and indifference. It would be foolish to unleash business totally, leaving it to its own devices without laws or regulations — but no reasonable person would ever suggest such a thing.

The greater danger, as I see it, is that this new growth will not be nourished, will not be recognized or believed, and will instead be cast aside and scorned. For if this happens, we will in our cynicism have missed one of the greatest windows of opportunity ever to open.

Helping this transformation take root and flour-

ish has become the mission of Business Ethics. We aim to promote ethical business practices in the best way we can, by celebrating those who act responsibly, by sharing role models and offering ideas that work. We want to support those who strive to be ethical, not criticize those who fall short.

As Business Ethics resumes publishing, I find myself recalling a vision that came to me in a meditation, early in this last and very difficult year: a vision of a cornucopia of angels — an enormous and wide cornucopia, and pouring forth from it, legion upon legion of angels. It proved an apt metaphor for what lay ahead, for 1988 was to become the Year of the Angels — with extraordinary people coming to my aid, like a legion of angels, earthly and grounded angels, extending hands of genuine flesh and blood. There's a community out there, and I have become fully a part of it. I'm not alone anymore — no longer alone in an armchair, with my clippings and ideas and dreams. ☰